EASI Strategy

Employment Access for Skilled Immigrants: A systems approach to facilitate the entry of skilled immigrants into the British Columbia labour market

LEADERSHIP COUNCIL
Discussion Paper

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EMPLOYMENT ACCESS FOR SKILLED IMMIGRANTS

Leadership Council

1. Purpose

To facilitate, communicate and foster the collaborative efforts of a diverse multi-dimensional system[1] to support the needs of skilled immigrants entering the workforce in British Columbia. This takes place within a systems model that promotes and recognizes excellence.

2. Background and Context

The Employment Access for Skilled Immigrants (EASI) Working Group is a consortium of representatives of regulatory and trade organizations, public and private educators, business and government who envisage a system in which British Columbia values and benefits from the skills, training, education, and experience of skilled immigrants by expediting their entry into the BC labour market in their field of expertise.

We believe that individuals who have attained credentials, skills, knowledge and experience outside of Canada should have access to labour market participation, career advancement, or further education and training in British Columbia

The Working Group shares a common observation that immigrants face numerous challenges in gaining access to employment in professions and trades in British Columbia, particularly those that are regulated. Over the past year we have identified evidence of the growing significance of the immigrant population in the province, and the myriad issues related to their integration into the labour market. There is also recognition that given the looming skills shortages in many key occupational areas, BC cannot afford to under-utilize the abilities of skilled immigrants.

We all benefit when immigrants put their skills to work in the Canadian labour market. The economy is bolstered, skill shortages are alleviated, and immigrant families thrive in their new country. The difficulties immigrants face in entering their specialized fields in Canada have been well documented in other studies. (An annotated bibliography is available upon request.)

The proposed EASI model focuses on practical solutions and a systems approach for BC.

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[1] Footnote: Webster's defines a system as "A regularly interacting or interdependent group of items forming a unified whole." In this context the "system" is comprised of services, programs and people who interact with immigrants. The people in the system include educators, employers, governments, non-government organizations, regulators, skilled immigrants, unions, workers (union and non-union), and others. See APPENDIX A for schematic description of the EASI systems model.

3. Terms of Reference

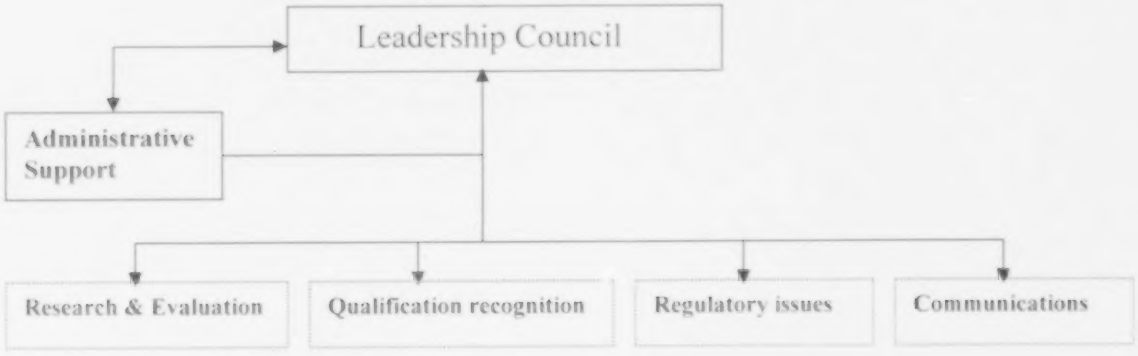
The leadership council utilizes a systems model within a multi-stakeholder venue to

- Promote the EASI systems approach
- provide advice,
- identify priorities,
- foster collaboration,
- identify and evaluate best practices,
- facilitate research, education and communication within the system,
- foster accountability by reporting on results.

The leadership council will provide the vision and leadership required to nurture the creation and continuation of a viable system. The council will identify linkages and provide guidance so that programs complement each other for the greatest impact. The council will monitor the system as a whole, communicate its successes and recommend improvements. The council will be a model of multiparty collaboration and provide needed leadership while respecting jurisdictions and autonomies.

3.1 Working Groups

In order to broaden stakeholder involvement and buy-in, there will also be Working Groups that will focus on specific subject areas. These groups will include content experts from any stakeholder who would be appropriate to contribute to the advancement of the topics presented to this group. It is recommended that there be at least one member of the Leadership Council on each Working Group and this person or persons will be responsible for ensuring communications and linkages to the Leadership Council.



(Note: The actual number and objectives of the Working Groups are to be determined by the Leadership Council)

4. Timeframe and Key Activities

4.1 Phase I – 1st year start up

- Ramp up the Leadership Council
- Develop Working Groups
- Develop administrative support structure
- Develop operating principles and policies
- Develop a strategic/action plans
- Develop a Communications strategy/plan
- Conduct initial research as required

4.2 Phase II – 2nd year development

- Continue to develop and refine operating policies as required
- Implement strategic and action plans
- Review administrative resource requirements
- Evaluate strategic and action plans, refine as required
- Issue progress reports and communiqués regarding best practices

4.3 Phase III – 3rd year evolution

TO BE DETERMINED

5. Membership

It is proposed that the membership of the Leadership Council will be composed of people who bring an ability to achieve a high level of oversight and influence within a critical sector. Special attention will be paid to ensure that representatives of current initiatives related to the objectives of the EASI initiative are on the Leadership Council.

It is recommended that an initial group of key people be appointed for a period of two years, and be given the prerogative to then determine (within six months) the composition of an additional round of appointments to a maximum of 15 members on the Leadership Council. This would allow the council to determine the appropriate mix of skills and constituencies that will best contribute to the EASI initiative. The sequencing of additional members will also allow for an orderly transition of Council members as their terms of appointment are completed.

Additional stakeholder involvement will be achieved through issue specific Working Groups. This will allow for a broadening of stakeholder involvement in the EASI initiative.

Details around membership rules and the size and scope of Working Groups will be determined during the developmental process of creating the Leadership Council.

As an initial starting point for discussion, Maytree recommended the following groups be considered for a national Leadership Council:

- Federal (Human Resources Development Canada) and provincial co-chairs of secretariat to Forum of Labour Market Ministers, and
- Federal (Citizenship and Immigration Canada) and provincial co-chairs of Access to Professions and Trades Working Group (lead).

Potential consultees:

- Canadian Heritage,
- immigrant organizations,
- employer organizations,
- colleges, universities,
- community-based training and settlement agencies,
- professional bodies,
- immigrant professional associations,
- regulators,
- Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (CICIC),
- the Alliance of Credential Evaluation Services,
- municipal governments,
- Metropolis Centres of Excellence.

**** What groups are appropriate for British Columbia?***

6. Operational Models

For the purposes of this discussion paper, 4 optional models will be described for consideration of how the Leadership Council could be organized. Final decisions about the preferred model will be informed by consultations with key stakeholders and potential funders.

The functionality of the Leadership Council will depend upon the extent of resources, both financial and in-kind support.

The strengths and weaknesses of each option will be discussed.

6.1 Option #1 - Volunteer Resources Model

This model would operate along the lines of a volunteer ad hoc committee. The Leadership Council would form itself and be resourced to the extent that members can provide the necessary energy, staff and financial supports required to fulfill its mandate and objectives. This model assumes 100% volunteer effort, with no paid staff.

Comparative models could include such examples as inter-agency committees or advocacy coalitions.

Strengths:

- Low cost/no cost
- Little to no liability
- Flexible
- Quick start-up
- Does not require formal or legal umbrella to operate under

Weaknesses:

- Vulnerable to unpredictable changes in resources
- May be restricted by inconsistent availability of resources
- May be viewed as having less credibility
- Member organizations that are already pressed for resources may find it difficult to contribute in-kind or financially
- Risk of loss of commitment
- Risk of being unsustainable

6.2 Option #2 - Multilateral Task Force Model

This model would operate along the lines of the ***Multilateral Task Force on Training, Career Pathing and Labour Mobility for Community Social Services*** that was structured in 1995. The original mandate was to develop a planning framework to guide the development of a sectoral approach to training, career pathing and labour mobility issues within the sector. Its success related primarily to its ability to ensure appropriate representation from community social service sector employers and workers, Government, and educators. (i.e. *employers* were represented by Employer Associations; *workers* were represented by the respective Unions and Professional Associations; *educators* were represented by Human Service Deans & Directors, Centre for Curriculum Transfer & Technology, and College Institutes Educators Association; and *government* was represented by each funding Ministry/Department).

Funding for this type of model would require: (1) a flat rate for an independent Chair for meetings (including prep time); (2) a small clerical support budget; (3) a small communications budget to produce an annual newsletter; and (4) a travel budget for Task Force members to attend meetings.

Strengths

- Relatively low overhead.
- Task oriented.
- Funding resources are primarily directed to "projects" managed by working groups within the Task Force rather than administrative support.
- Does not require formal or legal umbrella to operate under.

Weaknesses

- Vulnerable to unpredictable changes in resources
- May be restricted by inconsistent availability of "project" resources
- Member organizations that are already pressed for resources may find it difficult to contribute in-kind or financially.

More details about the Multilateral Task Force can be found at:

http://www.taskforceontraining.bc.ca

6.3 Option # 3 – Funded Secretariat Model

Under this model, both the Leadership Council and the Working Groups will be supported by a Secretariat with paid professional staff. The number and functions of the staff would depend on the scope of the Council and Working Groups. Sample staff functions are described in Appendix B.

This operational model would be appropriate if the assumption is that the EASI initiative requires dedicated resources in order to be effective in meeting its objectives, or inversely, that outcomes would not be easily achieved with people working "off the corners of their desks".

The requirement to have a dedicated Secretariat and staff to provide administrative support for the Leadership Council will depend to a large degree on the scope of activities that the Council and Working Groups undertake. A Secretariat would reflect the seriousness of the intent to support the EASI model in BC.

The Secretariat could begin with a small nucleus of staff and would grow incrementally, according to the expectations, scale of activities and timeliness required by the Leadership Council.

Strengths

- Model is familiar and similar to other existing initiatives
- Would be reasonably straight forward to ramp up
- Allows for involvement of broader range of stakeholders (in Working Groups)
- Secretariat staff would provide full engagement and focus on EASI activities
- Could evolve into independent organization

Weaknesses

- May require larger budget than is currently available from funders
- Vulnerable to shifts in government funding policies and priorities

6.4. Option #4 - Sector Council Model

(Note: This section is largely taken from the HRDC web site)
Funded under the federal Human Resources Partnerships program, Sector Councils are organizations led by a partnership of representatives in a defined area of economic activity, who seek to identify and address current and anticipated human resource and skills & learning challenges in various areas of the Canadian labour market.

Councils work to bring together representatives from business, labour, education, other professional groups, and government to understand issues and implement long-term, human resources planning and development strategies for their respective sector. The objectives of sector councils are to: define and anticipate skills requirements, promote lifelong learning in the workplace, facilitate mobility and labour market transitions, help workers get the skills and knowledge needed to drive innovation and to sustain a competitive advantage in the changing economy, and encourage the private sector to take ownership and invest in solutions that address skills challenges.

Sector councils represent:

- traditional industries such as steel and textiles;
- emerging industries like environment and biotechnology; and
- non-industry specific groups such as Women in Trades and Technology and Aboriginal persons and organizations

Finally, there are also national organizations with the mandate to address skills issues. While not formal sector councils, they often work with industrial/occupational sector councils to address issues related to one or more councils.

More details about Sector Councils can be found at:

http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/hrib/hrp-prh/english/sector/sectorcouncil_e.shtml

Strengths

- Potential for significant financial resources
- Potential for funding stability over 2-3 year period or longer
- Mandate is generally consistent with EASI objectives
- Would enable development of national model
- Could bring heightened profile to immigrant issues
- Broadened stakeholder network could facilitate innovation and synergies

Weaknesses

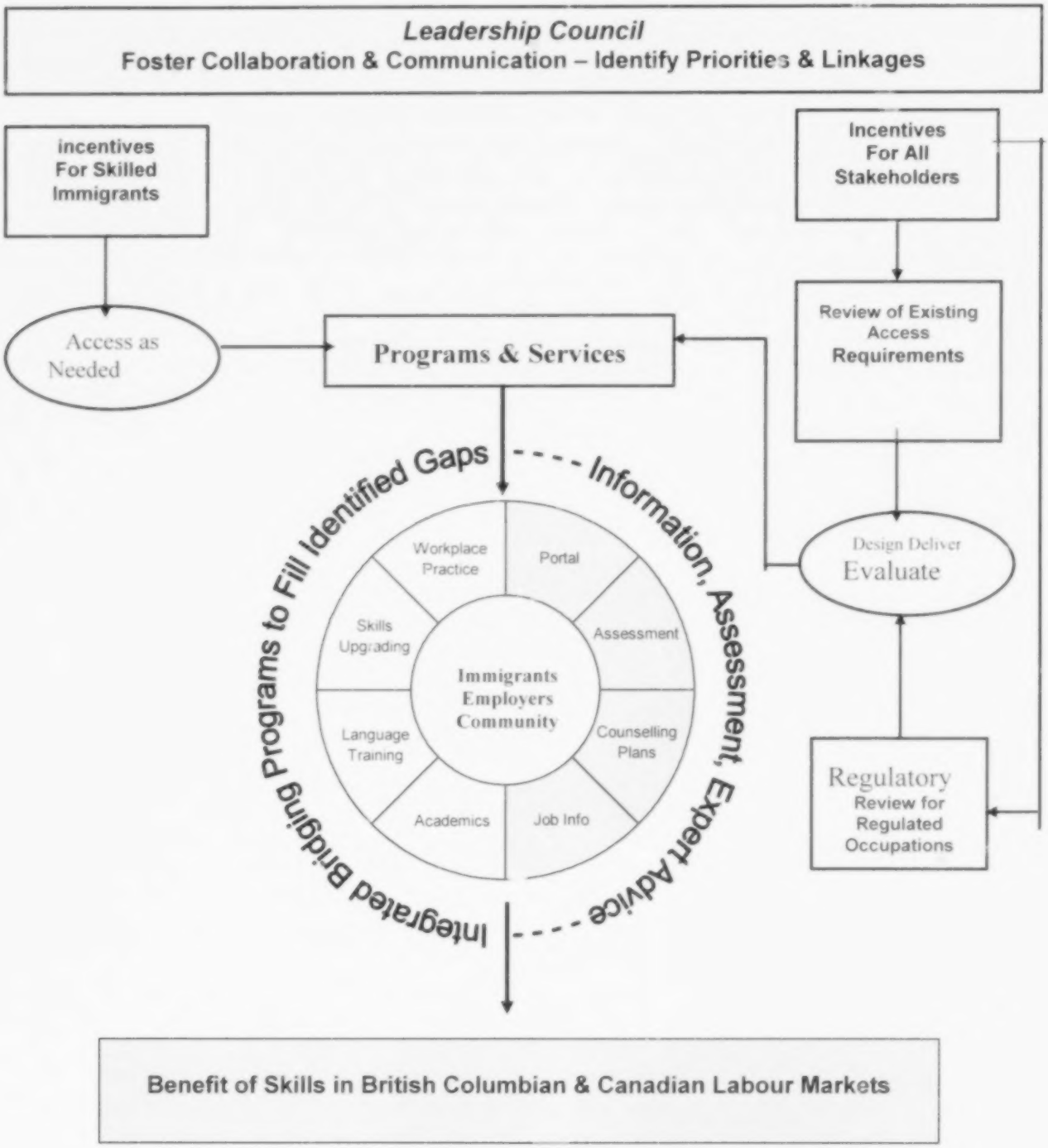
- National scope of sector council is beyond EASI mandate for BC
- National scope could dilute focus of efforts in BC
- Developmental work could take considerable time and effort

- Funding dynamics of Sector Councils will likely shift emphasis to federal government or national priorities and perspectives, which may not be the main interest of EASI participants in areas of provincial jurisdiction
- Requires some financial resources from stakeholders/users

7. Budget & Cost Estimates to be scoped out once a preferred option is selected

- ***TBD including wages/benefits, office/overhead, travel, communications, etc.,….***

APPENDIX A
Systems Approach to Facilitate Labour Market Entry for Skilled Immigrants



APPENDIX B
Administrative Support Functions

Here is a list of potential administrative positions/functions that could support some of the proposed operational models:

1. Director

The Director reports to the Leadership Council and is responsible for: coordination of the EASI initiative; leading strategic planning and accountability activities; allocation of resources; contract management; budget management; participates in research activities; and leads the general day-to-day administration; and other duties as required.

2. Research Officer

The Research Officer reports to the Director and is responsible for: coordinating, facilitating and implementing the research agenda that is developed in consultation with the Leadership Council; maintaining leading edge awareness of current data and research reports that support the objectives of the EASI initiative; conducting primary research activities where appropriate.

3. Communications Coordinator

The Communications Coordinator reports to the Director and is responsible for: identifying key EASI stakeholders in BC and elsewhere; establishing contact lists; in consultation with the Leadership Council, developing and implementing a communications strategy to support the EASI initiative; and ensuring effective internal communications between the Leadership Council, Working Groups and staff.

4. Administrative Assistant

The Administrative Assistant reports to the Director and is responsible for: general administrative support to other EASI staff including meeting arrangements, scheduling, photocopying, filing, word processing and other duties as required.

Budget & Cost Estimates to be scoped out once a preferred option is selected

- ***TBD including wages/benefits, office/overhead, travel, communications, etc.,….***

APPENDIX C – For reference purposes only, to be used to inform BC model

Excerpts from the Caledon Institute of Social Policy/Maytree paper (Note: this is proposed as a national council):

Leadership Council

Each of the program initiatives described earlier has merit on its own. However, when looked at as an interrelated whole, great synergies can be achieved. A few examples: The internet portal can facilitate access to bridging programs and online linkages to Canadian practitioners. LINC labour market language training can be integrated with occupational bridging programs at educational institutions. Regulatory reviews can result in revisions to requirements and how they are assessed, which then can inform the content of educational and occupational bridging programs.

A leadership council is a tangible way of bringing players together to provide the vision and leadership required to nurture the creation and continuation of a viable system. The council can identify linkages and provide guidance so that programs complement each other for the greatest impact. The council can monitor the system as a whole, communicate its successes and recommend improvements.

Perhaps the most important and challenging function of a leadership council is to foster collaboration among the multiple stakeholders. Collaboration is especially challenging when considering the sheer number of occupations, professional bodies, regulators, colleges and universities, and employers; the division of jurisdictional roles and responsibilities; the lack of clearly defined national spokespersons; scarce resources; competition; potential conflicts of interest; and lack of structures for interaction.

Further, collaboration will depend on the parties seeing themselves as working toward a common goal of facilitating labour market entry so Canada's economy can benefit from their specialized skills. Not all educational institutions or regulators, for example, see this as their role.

Fortunately, there are encouraging multi-stakeholder collaborations in place already, and a leadership council can play an important role in modeling and fostering even more. The economic climate itself could provide an incentive to collaborate for many participants.

Although a leadership council would not be responsible for delivering the proposed programs or services, it would be valuable to have the designated lead organization for each initiative as a member of the council.

The council would benefit from the results of program evaluations of bridging programs, and statistical reports from regulatory reviews, to recommend additional accountability mechanisms, measure success and point the way for further developments and description of proposed leadership council.

Description of proposed leadership council

A multiparty council would be created, including the `lead hands' for each proposed initiative and other participants. The mandate would be to play a `champion' role for the overall system and to foster collaboration. The council also could have some decision-making or funding responsibilities in selected areas.

Initial functions could include:

- Promote the **systems** approach
- Foster collaboration
- Determine research agend.
- Identify evaluation priorities
- Create a national program to recognize excellence
- Communicate among all participants.

Rationale/strengths

A leadership council can be seen as the `glue' that keeps the system together. It will foster the necessary collaboration; identify linkages to ensure that programs are effective and complementary; and keep track of and communicate results for greater accountability. As the leadership council itself will be composed of multiple stakeholders, it can set the example for multiparty collaboration. The proposed council would provide needed leadership while respecting jurisdictions and autonomies.

Challenges

It will be a challenge to design the composition, mandate and reporting structure of the leadership council in light of the numerous and varied players and jurisdictions.

A national leadership council is proposed to look at the system as a whole. However, provincial/territorial or sector structures also may be required. The challenge will be to keep the leadership council manageable so it supports the system without becoming a cumbersome bureaucracy.

Next Steps

Leadership Council

Meetings need to be convened to develop the mandate, composition and selection process for a leadership council.

Initial functions of the leadership council could include:
a. Promote the systems approach.
b. Foster collaboration.

c. Determine research agenda.
d. Identify evaluation priorities.
e. Create a national program to recognize excellence.
f. Communication.

Participants:
Federal (Human Resources Development Canada) and provincial co-chairs of secretariat to Forum of Labour Market Ministers, and federal (Citizenship and Immigration Canada) and provincial co-chairs of Access to Professions and Trades Working Group (lead).
Potential consultees: Canadian Heritage,
immigrant organizations, employer organizations, colleges, universities, community-based training and settlement agencies, professional bodies, immigrant professional associations, regulators, Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (CICIC),
the Alliance of Credential Evaluation
Services, municipal governments, Metropolis Centres of Excellence.